

VZCZCXYZ0000
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHLB #1336/01 3561519
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 221519Z DEC 09
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6236
INFO RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 3719
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 0110
RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME 0580
RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS 3853
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH 3564
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 3974
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 1510
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 1438
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 4260
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 001336

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/21/2019
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [UNSC](#) [PBTS](#) [KPAL](#) [LE](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: DEFMIN MURR PLANS SHAKE-UP IN SOUTH LEBANON

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: President Obama's message to Lebanese President Michel Sleiman on the importance of UNSCR 1701 was loud and clear, Defense Minister Murr told the Ambassador and visiting Special Coordinator for Regional Affairs Frederic Hof on December 18. Murr reported he would underscore this message by traveling south to visit UNIFIL headquarters on December 22 and by visiting all three southern brigades on December 24, the latter accompanied by President Michel Sleiman. Murr urged the U.S. to press Israel to cease overflights of Lebanon, which he said benefited only Hizballah, and he hinted that a prelude to formal cease-fire talks could take place in the UNIFIL-headed tripartite committee. The upcoming change of UNIFIL commanders would be a chance to inject new blood by also rotating the LAF brigades south of the Litani, Murr emphasized. Murr, who assessed that Hizballah will maintain the peace, reported that a Hizballah delegation offered to help prevent Palestinian groups from launching rockets from south Lebanon.
End summary.

MURR PLANS VISITS TO SOUTH LEBANON

12. (C) President Obama's message to visiting President Michel Sleiman's that UNSCR 1701 is "the key to Lebanon's stability and it should be the Lebanese Armed Forces' (LAF) priority to preserve it" was loud and clear, Defense Minister Murr told the Ambassador and visiting Special Coordinator for Regional Affairs Frederic Hof on December 18. To symbolize his priorities, Murr said he would travel with LAF commander Jean Kahwagi to Naqoura on December 22 with a press contingent to visit UNIFIL headquarters, inviting LAF brigade commanders to join them. In addition, Murr reported, he and President Michel Sleiman had agreed on the flight home from Washington to visit all three LAF brigades deployed south of the Litani River on December 24. The Ambassador welcomed this initiative, noting the importance of such a visit in symbolizing the state's authority throughout Lebanese territory. Hof informed Murr that he would immediately brief Special Envoy for Middle East Peace George Mitchell and the National Security Council about Murr's initiative in south Lebanon.

13. (C) Murr urged the U.S. to press the Israelis to cease all overflights of Lebanon, which he said Hizballah uses to highlight LAF impotence and justify its existence. Murr reported that Gen. Yossi Hayman, the IDF representative at

the tripartite committee, told LAF representative Gen. Abdulruhman Shehaitly that the issue of overflights is political, not military. If so, Murr said, let Israel seize the chance to move from a cessation of hostilities with Lebanon to a formal cease-fire. He recommended beginning with simpler issues, such as Israeli violations of Lebanese sea and air, before moving on to the issue of Israeli occupation of Ghajar or the Shebaa Farms. If the two sides could achieve a formal cease-fire, Murr explained, he would be able to address Hizballah as cease-fire "violators, not the Resistance." He hinted that discussions leading up to formal cease-fire talks could take place in the UNIFIL-headed tripartite committee even without formal cabinet approval.

SENDING NEW BLOOD TO THE SOUTH

14. (C) The change of UNIFIL commanders with Italian General Claudio Graziano's January 28 departure would be a chance to inject new blood into the south, Murr emphasized. To do so, he intended to rotate all three brigades currently in the south and replace them with new brigades. He also announced his intention to replace six of the 11 LAF brigade commanders nationwide. Murr complained that since 2006, his troops had become "too complacent" regarding Hizballah, and he alleged that Graziano's effectiveness was curtailed by his regular negotiations with Hizballah. Murr praised incoming Spanish commander Major General Alberto Asarta Cuevas as "a beast" who will address Hizballah more aggressively. Although Murr admitted that rotating the UNIFIL commander and the three LAF brigades at the same time could create instability, he asserted it was vital to give Asarta "a fresh start."

HIZBALLAH OFFERS COORDINATION

15. (C) Murr reported that following his December 12-15 trip to Washington with President Sleiman, he met with a Hizballah delegation that included MP Mohammad Raad, MP Ali Ammar, and MP Nawaf Moussawi. During the meeting, Murr informed his visitors that the question of arms smuggling had been replaced by the issue of rooting out Hizballah's existing stocks; that Israel would respond a rocket hitting its citizens by "destroying Lebanon"; and that if Hizballah efforts to destabilize UNSCR 1701 derail regional peace efforts, the region would blame Hizballah. Murr claimed that Raad replied that Hizballah would not "give Israel the pleasure of leading it (Hizballah) to war on their timing" to blame the collapse of peace efforts on the party. Murr, who assessed that Hizballah will maintain the peace, said that Moussawi requested a meeting with LAF intelligence head Gen. Edmond Fadl to "brainstorm how to keep Palestinians from launching rockets" from south Lebanon. Murr claimed that Moussawi added that Hizballah would urge its village commanders to provide LAF intelligence with the names of suspicious Palestinians and might consider entering Palestinian camps to detain suspects on behalf of the LAF.

16. (U) As promised, Murr and General Kahwaji flew to UNIFIL headquarters in Naqoura on December 22. Murr made it a point to underscore the GOL commitment to UNSCR 1701 in his comments to media after his southern tour.

17. (U) Special Coordinator for Regional Affairs Frederic Hof has cleared this cable.

SISON